

Faithful Innovation Learning Community Process

What is a Faithful Innovation Learning Community?

Faithful Innovation Learning Communities help congregation members and leaders develop deeper connections with God, each other, and their neighbors. This happens through the introduction of practices of action reflection involving listening, discernment, and small experiments. Within a supportive and structured peer learning environment, congregation members and leaders are freed to take risks as they discover a more hopeful future together.

Trainings and Coaching

The Faithful Innovation Learning Community is centered around teams of 5-8 lay people from local churches who gather for three daylong trainings over a 9-12 month period. These trainings are led by judicatory leaders, who are trained and coached in a group by Luther Seminary faculty/staff. In between the trainings, lay coaches from within each judicatory walk alongside the local church teams to accompany them in their work.

The three gatherings will focus on the following:

- Tracing God's Movement in our Lives and Neighborhoods
- Learn by Doing: Using Action Learning to Discover God's Leading
- Sharing Our Learning: Intentional Reflections on Our Actions

The first training is focused on simple practices that help congregation members identify God's presence and movement in their daily lives, congregation, and neighborhood. In the second training, participants are given simple action learning experiments that help the congregation learn more about what God might be up to in their midst and neighborhood and how to join in. For instance, if a congregation begins to notice the presence of neighbors from whom they are disconnected currently, they will be equipped to do simple learning and listening practices to connect with these neighbors. The third training involves harvesting learnings and defining a next round of experiments. This pattern of action/reflection and shared learning becomes a way for the congregation and the judicatory to innovate continuously into the future.

Training 1: Tracing God’s Movement in our Lives and Neighborhoods

This first training helps equip teams to lead their congregation in doing some significant listening to God in their local context. This involves dwelling in Scripture together, sharing spiritual stories within the congregation, and taking and interpreting pictures of where they see God at work. The goal for this piece is to help the participants begin to answer the questions, “How is God already at work in our community? and How can we join in?”

Monthly Coaching

After the first training session, monthly coaching calls will begin for the participants in the process and the clergy involved in the process. These calls will focus on helping the participants and their coaches take the steps outlined in the training and answering their questions. Clergy will be guided through some reflection on how this process might impact their approach to leadership.

Training 2: Learn by Doing—Using Action Learning to Discover God’s Leading

In this second Learning Community training, we focus on helping participants use action learning to deepen their exploration of the challenges they are facing. The idea is to help participants behave their way into new thinking, rather than only trying to think their way into new behaviors.

We approach this by giving participants sample action learning experiments to try. We want the training day to embody what we are trying to teach, so we will want to see if there is a way to have the participants experience action learning as part of the training. The assumption here is that the challenges congregations are facing are not ones that simply require technical fixes or a new program, but rather adaptive challenges that require new behaviors to help discover new ways of being the church.

Monthly Coaching

The coaching groups for the participants and their coaches focus on reducing any anxiety about doing these action learning experiments and helping people figure out how to get others from their congregation involved. The clergy coaching groups focus on helping clergy identify their own action learning experiments to try. These experiments are about leading in new ways in their congregations.

Training 3: Sharing Our Learning—Intentional Reflection on Our Actions

This training session focuses on helping the participants share what they learned from the action learning experiments they did since the last training. They are coached on how to reflect intentionally on their actions and the actions of other participants.

This session gives participants a chance to experience what it is like for the judicatory to function as a learning community/organization. As stories are shared by participants from various congregations, learning takes place across the broader system.

Monthly Coaching

All coaching groups will reflect on Training #3 and the process as a whole. What have we learned about God? About ourselves? About our neighborhoods? About our judicatory? What might God be leading us to do next?